

## About Zak Kukoff: Creator of the Autism Ambassadors Curriculum



The idea for Autism Ambassadors was conceived during the summer of 2008, by Zak Kukoff. When Zak was about three, a family member was diagnosed with Autism. For four years, Zak saw how she was mistreated and maligned in the classroom. Years later, when recalling his family member's negative experience, Zak came up with the idea for Autism Ambassadors and, with the help of a psychologist, developed a curriculum to teach typical children how better interact with their peers with Autism. Currently, the Autism Ambassadors program is being implemented in over 25 schools everywhere from Alaska to Australia. Autism Ambassadors is not only implemented in schools --- it is also being implemented in numerous summer camps, community centers, and places of worship as well.



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[www.varietyphila.org](http://www.varietyphila.org)

### **Variety's Autism Ambassadors**

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[www.varietyautism.org](http://www.varietyautism.org)



**The Autism Resource Initiative**

*Presents*



*Lowering the barriers that prevent children  
with Autism from participating in the  
school system as fully-functioning students*



## Variety's Autism Initiative

The mission of Variety's Autism Resource Initiative is to give families who have a child with Autism a sense of connection and belonging through recreational activities, workshops, parent groups and programming as well as to provide information on resources and assistance to families throughout the Delaware Valley.

Autism is a pervasive condition that affects millions of children in the United States and abroad. This year, 1 out of every 64 children will be diagnosed with one of the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), according to researchers at the University of Cambridge. These children will go through life stigmatized and rejected unless our system drastically changes. Autism Ambassadors aims to help children on the Autism Spectrum feel socially connected and integrated in their academic environment



## Variety's Autism Ambassadors Program

Variety uses a curriculum that will engage typical children and children with ASDs in a mutually beneficial relationship. Through extensive social and behavioral interaction, the typical children (the "Ambassadors") will learn about Autism: how it affects the brain as well as how to address problems pertaining to its outward manifestations.

All potential Ambassadors are interviewed and screened extensively before being approved and paired up with a child with Autism. Ambassadors are then trained extensively so that, by the time they interact with the child with Autism, they will be well-versed in recognizing firsthand the outward manifestations of Autism and teaching tolerance and understanding to other typical, mainstream children.

The children with Autism are slowly introduced to their Ambassador to maximize mutual comfort level and will eventually learn social and academic skills from the Ambassadors.

Potential Ambassadors are recruited from student government classes, gifted groups from schools, and those who engage in community service.

Families with children with Autism need to apply to this program as space will be limited.

For more information:

**Nicole Simon**  
**Autism Resource Coordinator**  
**215-735-0803 ext 16**

## Benefits

- Teachers will be better informed about the issues facing students with autism and the barriers they face in the school and classroom settings
- Students without autism will be better informed about the issues that their peers with autism
- Incidents of bullying in the school will decrease
- Barriers towards full participation in the school community will decrease for students with autism
- Students with autism will learn social and academic skills from their peers without autism

## How it works

The Staff at Variety's Autism Resource Initiative will introduce the Autism Ambassadors program. Variety will partner with your school and assist in the development and implementation of the curriculum. Training will be coordinated and materials provided. While each school program may look different, Autism Ambassadors is generally considered an extra-curricular activity for students involved. Like most extra-curricular activities group meeting may be held weekly for ongoing training and to discuss challenges and experiences. Variety coordinates ongoing support.